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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/PGI, IO/RHS, DRL/MLGA, AND EUR/AGS.

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN SUPPORT FOR BOSNIA'S UNHRC CANDIDACY

REF: STATE 021984

¶1. EconPolOff delivered reftel demarche regarding UNHRC EEG candidates on February 26 to Engelbert Theuermann, Director of the MFA's Human Rights Division. Theuermann agreed it was important to have strong democracies occupy as many seats as possible on the Council. Theuermann added that the GoA was only aware that two Eastern European countries--Slovenia and Belarus--are seeking UNHRC seats. Theuermann said Austria will support the Slovenian bid, because it is a "model country" in terms of democratic development, rule-of-law, etc. Moreover, Slovenia will assume the EU Presidency next year, thereby enhancing its role in the UNHRC.

¶2. In regard to Belarus, Theuermann said, Austria had resigned itself to work with Belarus on the Council. However, with the prospect of a Bosnian candidacy, the GoA would instead strongly support Bosnia's bid for a seat on the UNHRC. Theuermann added that Bosnia is a strong democracy and would be a welcome addition to the Council.

¶4. Theuermann noted that normal coordination among the EU countries is difficult, because no formal mechanisms exist to coordinate members' positions on elections. Nonetheless, Austria will raise the issue of Bosnia's candidacy in Brussels to garner support for it within the EU. However, Theuermann expressed concern that Bosnia might not have enough time to garner enough support for its candidacy.
McCaw